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TPI Transition Remarks

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As all of you who have followed TPI over the years know, Tom has done an amazing job building the organization. I'm especially pleased that although he will be president emeritus he will remain a senior fellow at TPI, contributing to and shaping the technology policy agenda. I am honored to follow in his footsteps and hope to live up to his example.

A lot of you have been with TPI from the beginning—as donors, participants, authors, and, yes, sometimes critics. We appreciate that loyalty. Others have joined the TPI family more recently, and we're grateful for that.

We strive to produce rigorous, honest, and independent research. With your support we've produced 75 full-length policy papers, 63 op-eds, and 48 testimonies and regulatory filings. That output comes from full-time TPI scholars as well as affiliated researchers -- 45 scholars in all.

We also provide forums for people of diverse views to educate, argue, and learn from each other. Since 2011, 831 different people have attended TPI events, not including this event, TPI's Aspen Forum, now in its seventh year. A few of you have been to all seven, many of you have been to more than one. We hope that all of you will want to return next year and in the years to come.

Probably like many of you, I've always been fascinated by technology. At 12 I built a computer. (Well, a calculator, to be honest. And it could only add and subtract. But still). Today, I load up our house with almost anything that can connect to the network—lights, water leak temperature and humidity sensors, Amazon Echo, smoke detectors, smoke detector detectors, and a security camera.

So far, the most excitement our web security cam has caught is our dog eating a cheesecake off the counter. *My* cheesecake.

Some of those gadgets may help save our house someday. Though hopefully they'll just continue to be my toys. But tech is more than toys. Even relatively low-speed broadband allows anyone to learn math, science, economics, and other topics from Khan Academy. Cellphones mean a late-night car breakdown isn't a terrifying experience. ICTs have revolutionized logistics management in ways that allow goods and services to flow around the world in ways unimaginable only a few years ago.

Getting public policies right is key to enabling technological improvements. But that's not easy--the issues are complex and policy must recognize that not everyone values the same things. Economic analysis is not always welcome. We recognize that resources are finite: if you use them for one thing you can't use them for another, and efficiency is crucial to growth. For economists, policy is all about "constrained optimization." That's why economics is called "the dismal science" and why Harry Potter

might have said if you get too close to the American Economics Association annual meeting you might find that “every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you.” Unlike dementors, however, the kind of sobering news economics brings promotes the public interest.

The other side of the “constrained maximization” coin is that good microeconomic policies are often not popular or feasible in the short run. But continued research and engagement can eventually make economically smart policies possible. This was true, for example, with spectrum auctions: Ronald Coase first proposed them in 1959 but they did not become a reality until 35 years later.

We want to follow in those footsteps -- having the guts to make arguments consistent with economic analysis and data even when they’re unpopular, the grit to keep arguing our case even when it isn’t easy, and the ability to recognize when new evidence and analysis show us we’re wrong.

Not that I’m ever wrong.

I want TPI to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how policy affects technological change. We might not always agree on things, and that’s ok. But I am committed to producing the best, most rigorous and honest economic policy analysis we can.

To do that, we need your help.

We need your financial support to make sure we can keep doing the work. You, and other insightful supporters, make this possible.

We also need other kinds of contributions: ideas, new scholars you come across who you think should be more involved in policy, and your honest feedback on what we do right and--probably more importantly-- what we could do better.

In the end, regardless of industry, academic field of study, or advocacy position, I think we all share a common belief: that technology can make the world a better place and that the role of policy is to make sure that happens.

Thank you.